

GAIL BRUNO INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEWER: Candacy Taylor

INTERVIEWEE: Gail Bruno

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SUBJECTS: Troy Association of Hairdressers; servicing older women; losing clients to cancer and Alzheimer's; Racial segregation in beauty schools; physical labor of hairdressing; making connections with clients.

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KEY: CT – Candacy Taylor (Interviewer)
GB – Gail Bruno (Interviewee)
CB – Carol Burford (Field Assistant)
AP – Aileen Picarillo (Hair Model/client)

[Sitting at her kitchen table in the basement of her house, Gail has photo books and newspaper clippings of her younger years in the beauty business]

GB: This is when we had a big Troy [New York] Area Association of Hairdressers... we were affiliated with the national [chapter], but that's really old.

CT: Look at you!

GB: Yeah, that's '73. I have tons of show pictures, but I didn't know if that would be anything you wanted to see. We used to put on a lot of shows, our Hairdressers Association. We really had some good shows, beautiful shows.

CT: I would like to see those.

GB: Would you? God love 'ya honey. I got a lot of them. I don't know if you'd be interested in all of them but you can look at some of them. I grabbed them all out, so you can look at them. There's a lot here, hon. And I brought a book from when I started here so that you could see the difference in my customers from then.

CT: Ok, we'll get to that after the interview.

[Gail signs the consent form and we check the audio levels]

CT: What's your favorite diner in town?

GB: Dunkins, everything is home made. It's up on Hoosik St. We go there all the time. Everything is homemade and they have great pancakes. They use fresh butter, if you ask for whip cream, you get real whip cream not make-believe whip cream, which they usually only have in the summer with strawberries and everything. It's just a local place. You would love this place. It is old. They have never changed a thing. My son worked there. All the kids seem to work there. But Grandpa, who is the owner, Mr. Dunkin, he was tough on the kids.

CT: He wasn't really your grandpa? You're just calling him...

GB: No, that's what they called him. A cute story, I used to have an old car and he had the same kind of car so if I had to go see my son Frankie, I'd run up and they'd see the car coming and they were all outside, where they were supposed to be working and they'd run right inside the place so they wouldn't get in trouble with Grandpa but anyway my car and his were alike, they ran when they seen me comin'. [laughing]

CT: Ok we're good [with the audio levels]. I'm here with Gail Bruno and we are in Troy, New York and it is August 13, 2012 and it is 11:13am and Carol Burford is present and I am Candacy Taylor. So tell me your full name and the number of years you've been doing hair.

GB: Ok, I've been doing hair since 1961. I graduated from high school and then went into hairdressing. How many years is that? You've got to help me with the years....'61, '71, '81, '91, 2000,

CT: About 51 or 52 years.

GB: Yeah. Which is a long time. Oh, my name it's Jean really, Jean Gail Bruno. I don't go by Jean. I go by Gail.

CT: Ok, why did you choose hair?

GB: Well I didn't. I was going to go to Albany Business School, I was gonna be a secretary and one of my best friends was going to beauty school. She said, "Why don't you go with me, you'd probably like it." So she convinced me to go she said when you pass your test at least, even if you're a secretary, you'll have something

to fall back on. So this many years later, I'm still doing hair. I was very fortunate. I got hired right away and never had a problem.

CT: And you waitressed for a short time?

GB: I did, for a very short time [big smile]! I loved it. My girlfriend got me involved in that. Mostly like weddings, God a few times I did cocktails at night, but most of the time it was weddings and banquets, but I had a good time doing it. I also did telemarketing. Along with that I still was a hairdresser, I never gave that up but telemarketing I did at night, and I loved it. I really did. People hate telemarketers but I learned over the years, especially with my mother, I did very well on credit cards. Because my mother at one time couldn't get a credit card, the girl said to her, "Wait until you get one sent to you in the mail and just open that credit card." So while I was on the phone, there were a lot of people who were very....they're sad. You know people that are home and they've lost their husbands and different things. I loved it because I would tell them, "It's a great thing. Even if you have your husband you really need your own credit card. I was doing so well in telemarketing that we had to pay extra taxes, so I wound up after three years giving it up. But I did like it and that's when telemarketing was in its heyday. They didn't have all these restrictions or anything. But it was great. I enjoyed talking to people I got to meet people all over the country on the phone. I would get in trouble a lot because I would talk too much. You can tell that can't 'ya? I mean I could talk to them for hours and they're lonesome, you know older people and I was honest I really felt they did need it, maybe that's why I could sell it. They tried to have me sell a beauty package from Florida, and do you know I never sold a one. I thought the package was so overpriced, in my head I couldn't sell the thing. I guess I just didn't believe in it. They thought I would shine in that one, right? It was terrible, couldn't do a thing!

CT: It sounds like you're just a genuine spirit...

GB: Maybe it came through on the phone. Who knows! But I couldn't sell that hairdressing stuff, that was beyond me.

CT: So do you think because you have such a good rapport with people, it sounds like you really love people...

GB: That's really what I like about it. Yeah, after all these years, I have people that have been with me, my customer that's coming, she's been with me over forty years. I've had some from fifty years that are still with us. I've lost major, major customers. Very depressing 'cause you get close, you know you see them every week. It's not like nowadays where the girls see their customers sometimes like six months, they come for this or they come for that. I mean, my customers, [they come] every single week. I see them more than they see their families sometimes. I know a lot more than a lot of their families know about them, you know!

CT: How much do they divulge?

GB: They really tell you a lot. You know, especially about illnesses and if they're sad, especially if they're a parent. Who have they got to talk to when they're older? They can't tell their kids a lot of stuff. So they come here. We talk about everything. We talk about things we shouldn't: politics, religion. Oh my God, that's a real no-no, but oh boy, it comes out all the time. We get into arguments, but I mean it's over with, you know. We're all opinionated, I assume. But I love my customers.

CT: Do you always have one customer?

GB: No, I try to group them and it makes it easier for me with conversation. I remember one time I had a terribly sore throat and I said to them, "You're going to have to carry on the conversation today, I can't talk, my throat is killing me." Right. Well, nobody spoke! It was horrible, horrible. I said, "Alright I'll talk, you guys are killing me." But they don't talk amongst themselves unless I talk. I don't know why. Maybe years ago it was different because the shop was bigger and I had more people in there. My mother also worked with me, I told you that.

CT: How long did she work with you.

GB: Well from 1960 up until she got really sick. When I came over here she always worked with me. [She] kept my [appointment] book for me and everything. [She] always answered the phone, took care of the customer's you know, getting coffee, tea, all that kind of stuff, cleaning for me. It was nice, you know, you've got your mother. And it was good for my mom. It gave her something to do. She passed away at 93, but she was only six months between going to rehab and a nursing home, we figured a little less than six months. She fell. We were on our way to a party and she was in her bedroom and she grabbed for her walker but she went backwards and she broke her pelvis. She had many bouts of illnesses though, she had two breast cancers, she had lymphoma, heart problems...my mother was like the bionic man. She was amazing really. People couldn't believe how well she got along, but I think a lot had to do with how well she got along with the customers. The family, you know, we would always eat upstairs together. We always ate together, all of us.

CT: So what did she do for a living?

GB: Nothing.

CT: She was a homemaker.

GB: Yeah, she was with me forever. My dad died during World War II, so my mother raised me alone and we were *extremely* close. I hope you two [me and my mother] are as close as we were because we really had a great relationship. She was always there, just like your Mom. You know I always called my mother, "Mommy" I know that's so babyish, but I always did. Her hairdresser way back said, "I can't believe you call your mother 'Mommy.'" And I said, "Marge, yeah, I do. I always have." I was in high school then. She said, "That's so babyish." But 'til the day she died, that was just our thing. But my doctor he said to me, "I noticed

over the years, you always called your mother 'Mommy' but as your mother got older and she needed my help..." And of course I had my son then. Then I wound up calling her 'Gram.' Isn't that so weird? He's the one that noticed that. He said to me, "I notice you call your Mom every once in a while, 'Gram' instead of 'Mom.'" I said, "Oh, my God, doctor, I never even noticed that." But that's how life changes.

CT: Were you an only child?

GB: Yes, so is my son. Are you?

CT: No, but my brother and sister are so much older than me so I grew up basically like an only child.

GB: Yeah, you are like an only child, and my son is an only child, but I have a stepdaughter too. We have a lot of hairdressers in the family. My stepdaughter is a hairdresser, my sister-in-law is a hairdresser, my brother-in-law is a hairdresser, Kim who is my stepdaughter, her mother and stepfather are also hairdressers so we have major hairdressers in the family.

CT: That's interesting. Why do you think that is?

GB: I don't know maybe with Kimmie, it was her mom being a hairdresser? I don't know. It's just that my brother-in-law was. He's my age, my brother-in-law. But then Karen is more the younger side of the family. But she became a hairdresser too. I don't know why we all did we just all fell into it, maybe because we like to be in the limelight. What do you think? We like to feel important [big smile]. Who knows? I don't know.

CT: You know when you were talking about your regulars and how important they are. You said you lost some of your customers. Can you tell me stories about that?

GB: Lots, yes. One girl, Mary Haughney, she was diagnosed with cancer. But it was weird how it happened. She was a very close friend of mine. I started doing her hair when I moved to 15th Street. And she had two little girls. She got cancer, was diagnosed very quickly, the doctor assumed everything would be all right. When they did the biopsy and everything, she was in stage-four breast cancer with a very, very small tumor and she fought that for years, she went to Boston, she did everything. She tried everything on the market. And we finally lost her after about three years. Another one of my customers, Mary Church, she got can...you know it's mostly...a lot of cancer, very few people that just passed. My one friend Sarah she got older and everything broke down on her, she had had a kidney transplant and at that time they gave you a lot of steroids and things and she had a lot of problems fighting things, minor things that you and I would be able to fight, she couldn't.

CT: Did you go to their funerals?

GB: Oh God, yes. Good lord, yes, a terrible, a terrible amount of funerals. People don't understand how it is with hairdressers. I don't know how to put it. When you go to a funeral, the family doesn't know how close you have been over the years with their people, you know, they don't understand that this is not really a client — this is a friend. You know. And they know everything about me. I tell everything. My mother used to say, "Will you shut your mouth! You tell too much." I said, "Yeah, I know Mom, but I can't help it." And they tell me everything so, they're like your friends. I have lost major people. I went from having many, many customers, down to maybe ten, twelve. I work now at the same prices I've worked at for twenty years. I haven't changed my prices at all. A lot of them are retired. They say to me, "You're crazy. Why don't you raise your prices?" And I say, "How can I raise my prices on you people? That's ridiculous. You've been coming to me forever, so it isn't money, really, at this point. I think in the end it will probably cost me more money to run the shop, because you have to have insurance, your license and all that. It probably cost me more. I never bothered to figure it out.

CT: How much does insurance cost?

GB: I think I pay \$450, but because I have the shop here, my house [insurance] is higher. They charge me more for the house, even though I have a separate insurance for the shop.

CT: \$450 a month or?

GB: No, \$450 a year or \$500, in that area. But then the house is a lot more, because of me having the shop. I tried to get it cheaper someplace else and as soon I tell them I have a shop, they say, "No, stick with what you have."

But as far as funerals go, I got way off the track didn't I? Funerals, ah, Marge McDermott we lost her. We were close. It just makes you really...I could fill up, I could start crying but I don't want to. I want to be good. But I've lost tons of people. Mary Church, she had cancer in her jaw. She went through hell. Another friend of mine who was a hairdresser, Ann Marie Duncan, she passed away, she had a brain tumor and you have to shave their head. It's horrible. I can't talk about it.

CT: Well thank you for sharing it with me.

GB: Yeah, it's just hard. It's such an upsetting time, with cancer. My girlfriend Mary said to me, I never really felt like I had cancer until I had my Chemo and my hair came out. When she lost her hair, it was like, "I have cancer." You know it's like an awakening. It's a horrible thing. But you know cancer is so silent. You don't even know it. Most times, you don't have pain.

CT: It's a scary thing.

GB: It is a scary thing and having to buy people wigs [sighs], it's horrible.

CT: What is it like when the hair grows back?

GB: Fine. Chemo Curl.

CT: Oh, it's called Chemo Curl.

GB: That's what I call it. We all call it that. My one customer that lives up in Saratoga, she had a little natural twist in her hair and Helen's hair, when it came back, it was like fuzz, an over-processed perm. The first time, the second time, it's weird. The top of her hair has beautiful curl in it. Well I call it Chemo Curl, that soft kind of curl, wash it and let it go. My mother's came in curly, until we cut it off, when she lost hers. Just about everybody's does. Mary Haughney said to her doctor. She said, "Now I know I'm going to lose my hair." He said, "Yeah, you probably will." She said, "But when I lose my hair, I want it to come back, blonde, long flowing and curly." [tearing up]

I gotta get a Kleenex, they're right over there and I don't want to get up with my mic on. [We get a Kleenex for her]. That's what you get for filling up, right? [smile] Thank you hon. Thanks Carol.

If I look in my book, I can even tell you other ones. I'll show you here. This is an older book. I wish I had my first books. I used to work quite a bit. But here's my book. Now my book consists of two steadies and maybe five here. That's it. Once in a while I'll work a Saturday or whatever, but that's how my book used to look. No more. Passed away June, Mary Mulcahy she had Alzheimer's. That's another thing that's really tough on hairdressers...I was trying to remember this. I've had a few customers that have gotten Alzheimer's over the years and I can see it. Okay. But how do you say to a family member? It's very hard to say to them, I think there's a problem, when we're not doctors you know? But you can tell by little things. Mary, she would ask me the same question over and over and over again. Another girl Marge Harley...

CT: Did you ever go to a family member and say anything?

GB: No. I just didn't. I couldn't bring myself to do that because I think they're in denial. I think they know it but they don't want to know it. They don't want to see it.

CT: But you said you spend so much more time with them.

GB: Right, yeah. You know they're here at least an hour and a half, so you're talking to them every week for that length of time. They get perms and if we get talking they stay longer. So you are used to it, and poor Mar, she would ask me fifteen times, this one time when we were going away, she said, "I tried to tell Jo where you were going and I couldn't remember, where is it?" And I'd tell her. And then maybe ten minutes later she would ask me again. She'd walk to the shop and one day she said, "I had to stop somebody and ask them where I was. I forgot where I was." And I said to myself, *Oh, good Lord*. It was different things. It's really horrid, isn't it really? And the girl that's coming today, she was actually the

first time I ever heard about Alzheimer's. Her husband was one of the first people that I knew that was diagnosed. You know how long ago that was. You're young [speaking to me] you know that's part of life. But for us, Alzheimer's was never diagnosed as that. And her husband, she said to me, "I don't know what's going on with Al." He'd do different things you know. And then she said, "Something is really wrong with Al." Now he had a slight stroke so they thought it was all that but they kept testing, testing. He would walk into walls and not even know how to turn around. She had a lock on her bedroom door to lock him in because he would get out at night you know and roam around on her. Oh, it was horrible. But on the um...the educational channel. She said to me out at the shop, she said, "I know you want to know what's going on with Al." She said, "Turn it on, there's a program on there that tells you all about this disease." And that was my first time that I ever heard about it. And boy now, that's all you hear about. But way back then, we really didn't know anything about it. [To my mother] Do you remember back that far? That was not a part of the conversation.

CB: No.

GB: And of course with cancer too, years ago, we didn't even talk about that. That was a no-no. That was a thing, you just didn't say, "Oh, they have cancer." It was like a horrible thing. You remember that Carol, how bad it used to be? It was like unmentionable.

CB: Hmm mmm.

GB: At least now, people are more open about things. You don't realize it until you think about it. Because I never thought about these things until you called me. And I said, "Geez, you know when you think about all this stuff. My God." People have gone through so much in their lives that we know about, you know. It's a learning thing. I'll tell you. Working as a hairdresser. You learn everything. Even my stepdaughter, she said, "I feel like a psychiatrist when I come home some nights." I said, "You got that one right." You try to say the right words, because you want to make sure you're not saying the wrong thing to them. [you say] *Things will be alright, you'll get by*. My one customer one time, she was a very devout Catholic and her son was getting a divorce and she thought people were talking and I said Marge, believe me, they might say to you, "Oh, I hear that Jimmy's getting a divorce." And you say, "Yes, he is." And in five minutes they have more problems going on in their life, they don't want to hear about Jimmy's divorce. I said, "So don't think people talk about you, they don't. You think they do. But they don't." People are too involved in themselves, I think.

CT: That's good advice. You're right about that. In terms of dressing hair, from what I can tell it seems very physical.

GB: Uh huh.

CT: Do you have any pains? What kind of conditioning do you do? What's the worst part?

GB: The worst part. Well arthritis, I suppose. And after a long day, yeah, I do get tired. That's why I'm really glad I'm not working as much as I used to. As a matter of fact, I had a hip replacement. And I think that has a lot to do with standing for so many years. It's that constant, you know you're pushing your spine. And you always have an ache in your back. But it's gravity. You know over the years, that's what happens. And of course my feet will swell if it's too hot in the summer. I think we all get that one. Oh, yeah and a couple of weeks ago I fell down the back stairs, I sprained my wrist but it's okay now. It was like maybe two or three weeks that it was bothering me. But I worked. You know it's not like a job where you get paid for time off. I was back to work with my hip after a month. I was working. With a walker, but I was working.

When I had my son, that was the longest I had ever been off, I took three months off to have him but then he came to the shop with us. He was my buddy. He grew up there he was a very fortunate boy. But like your hands...I have arthritis in my thumbs in real bad and I think that's really the main thing, your hands. And through here [touches her shoulder/neck area], muscles, that's a bad one, even my stepdaughter has that. I always say to my skin doctor when I go, "Oh, I got an itch there. Are you sure there's nothing there?" And she says "No there isn't. It's a nerve." It's all the tension here. You can feel it. You know, especially your neck.

CT: I was curious because a lot of hairdressers have said that have to get massages.

GB: Yeah, a lot of them do and when I go to my chiropractor he usually works on my back, on my neck, on my shoulders because that's really where you hurt the most. I think, even more so than my legs. My legs don't bother me as much as my back does. Of course I'm tall too. I'm bending over all the time at the sink and all that, that's a lot too. But I think I just go with it.

CT: I want to talk about hair dye and the chemicals you work with.

GB: I just use Clairol. I've never changed from that. I've used it for years.

CT: What's the most common color you use to dye hair?

GB: I used to bleach a lot but now more in the browns, soft brown colors, none of the darker colors because they're older, a lot of them are white, some blondes.

CT: What percentage would you say are fifty and older?

GB: Oh my God, let's see. One hundred [laugh], no I'd say 90%.

CT: What percentage would you say are seventy and older? Do you have any that are seventy?

GB: Oh God yes! I have them ninety! As a matter of fact I did a girl yesterday, I don't work Saturdays, but if something comes up, I'll do their hair. Betty Carr she's ninety, she's having a birthday party. I worked Saturday, I did her hair, she turned

ninety. I would say a lot of my customers are in their eighties, seventies, in that area. I have a few that are younger than I am but not an awful lot.

CT: How long have you had the home salon?

GB: We figured it out, I've got it on a picture and I don't know where it is. I think it's like over thirteen years.

CT: But before that you worked...

GB: I had another shop on 15th Street. That's where I had a bigger shop. I only worked by myself though, I never had anybody work with me, and then before that I worked in Wynatskill, with my girlfriends. And we worked for Joan LaFleur. And there was the JoAnn Shoppe out there and I worked there for like three, three and a half years and then I went to 15th Street and then from there my mother went away actually to Florida and I was having a lot of problems over there, they didn't fix the place up for me or anything and Frank was really the one that was doing everything for me. So he said to me, "As long as your mother's going away, let's put the shop in the house." I said, "Oh Frank, I don't want to do that." And anyway, we put the shop out there and I've been there ever since but it worked out well.

When my mother got older and sicker, my customer's were great, they helped me a lot. When she was sick a few times, she couldn't even get out of bed sometimes, so they'd give her a glass of water. They'd go in and sit...see my mother's bedroom was right there where my computer room is now. So the people from the shop could come in and talk to her and then as she got better, they'd come in here, they'd sit with her for a little while, they'd have a cup of tea...you know what I mean? It was so nice for her to be able to have that. And it worked out so good for me. I never would have been able to keep up hairdressing and take care of my mother. She had a bout when she was going through Chemo where she was dehydrated, she had thrush and actually she really was insane for a while. I was up all night with her. She would sleep all day and I'd say, "Ma, how can you do this to me. Don't you know I'm up all night with you?" [She'd say], "Oh, you'll be alright." [I'd say], "Yeah, I will." But she had a twin bed. The dog, myself and my mother were in there one night because she swore she was down at Albany Medical Hospital and she was going through a machine and she said, "I'm so glad you could be in the machine with me, you and Bianco." It was horrible. That was a terrible time. That lasted I would say, maybe a month.

CT: And your customer's really helped you through that time?

GB: They were really good. Yeah. And it's good to have somebody to talk to. Who could I talk to? I couldn't tell my family, "This is really horrible. I'm going through so much now my mother's so sick, I need help." Who's going to do what I did for her? You know that [speaking to my mother]. You know what it's like when someone is older. There are things you have to do that you just do. And I wanted to work. I wasn't giving up work either. So I did it all. But it didn't last long. It

went by fast and then you look back and say *how did I ever do that?* I don't know how I could do all that stuff.

CT: What are the most old-fashioned hair techniques that you do?

GB: I would say rollers [roller sets] and some of them still want pin curls on the bottom. [They say] "I want pin curls down there. It stays better." So I do that. If they want it all in pin curls I do them up in pin curls.

CT: I still do roller and pin curls [on my hair].

GB: Do you?

CT: What's the most modern technique that you do?

GB: I would say blow-drying. I learned to blow-dry when I was...Oh God, *long* time ago. When it first started to come in. And thank God I belonged to the Association because the girlfriend and I, we used to go to the conventions. And that's where we really learned how to blow-dry.

CT: Can you tell me about the association and when you started?

GB: I started right away in '60. It was the Troy Area Hairdressers Association. But we were affiliated with the National Hairdressers Association. So we went to conventions here and there like Washington and that. The Association, it was really good because we all worked together, if you went and you learned something then you would come back and teach it in your shop. We weren't like competitive, is that the word I want to use? We were really more like friends. And it was a real good learning place for me and of course my boss, she was President of the Association at one time.

CT: So did the Association give an overview of the industry, what was happening, was it about the trends?

GB: It was about everything. When you went to the conventions, you learned all the new techniques, like I said with the blow-drying and [all] that. But also when you went to meetings we talked about running a shop, different things, we also had a lot of shows, we used to put on shows which was nice because all of your customers came, a lot of the public came and let you know what we were all about.

CT: Was it a presentation or a competition?

GB: No, we just did presentations when we went to conventions, like my sister-in-law and I were in a few competitions, I was in a lot of competitions too. Overall it was really a learning thing with all of us and also to have friends that were hairdressers that you could talk about, "This one did this and that one did that, and this one's a pain right in the butt!" You know what I mean? You had people

that were going through the same thing that we could talk about together that we could talk about our customers about.

CT: Was there ever a union?

GB: No. No. They talked about it. They talked about going in with the barbers at one point and everything but that never came about. They wanted to do like the barbers did, with one pricing throughout and that never went over. That was put down right away. So there was a lot to it. But I was really involved in the fun part.

CT: So how long were you involved?

GB: I would say ten years, fifteen years.

CT: Is it still around?

GB: Not like it used to be. No they don't do...I don't think there is a separate Troy...I think they're all affiliated with Albany now. If you did belong to the Association, I think it would be Schenectady, Albany, Troy all in one. Not like it used to be. We had quite a few members. We had a lot of fun, a lot of older girls, a lot of younger people. They call it "Guild." If you made "Guild" you went to the state. It was a competition and then you could teach at different shows or things like that. My brother-in-law made Guild back a while but I never tried. At the time I was having my son and I didn't. That's kind of when I got away from it a little bit. Priorities, right? Even though I liked doing that, the traveling was tough.

CT: Can you talk about the learning process of dealing with different types of hair texture? Do you get different types of hair texture here?

GB: What do you mean honey?

CT: Doing curly hair versus straight hair....

GB: Some of my customers that have curly hair I don't...of course you don't give them any perms or anything. I don't like doing real coarse thick hair. I do it, but I don't like to do it.

CT: Why not?

GB: Because it's very hard to bend it and it wants to go its own way. I would rather work on a fine textured hair, not too fine, but medium textured hair that has a little bit of a curl to it, that I would love. That's perfect. I have one woman. She's an older woman but my mother always said, "Oh my God, I love Maria's hair." She didn't do anything to it. All's I did was just cut her and let it go and it just fell right into place you know that's so cool. But I don't like coarse hair, but I do it.

CT: Do you find you have people with coarse hair, because you said on your pre-questionnaire that 100% of your clients are Caucasian.

GB: Oh yeah, but there's different textures in Caucasian [hair] too. No they are all Caucasian. Back when I was younger we could not work on any other type of hair. We were licensed differently. We could not do anybody *but* Caucasian. I don't know why. I think because of the processing. You know like with straightening and all that, I think that is why we weren't licensed to really do that.

CT: So when you went to beauty school, it was only Caucasian hair?

GB: Yes, really, that's all we did. And I think at that time, you had to have a special license, I'm almost sure.

CT: That's interesting because now in cosmetology school they do give you training in different textures but it's still very limited.

GB: Exactly. Yes, yes honey, it is. And that's weird when you think about it 'cause now that would never happen. I never even thought about that until you just said that.

CT: What year did you go to beauty school?

GB: '60-'61. I graduated from high school in '60 and I went almost right away, my girlfriends and I, we worked together.

CT: And the salons you worked at were all white women?

GB: All white.

CT: And it was in this area?

GB: Oh, yeah honey, it was only like a suburb of Troy it's not that far away it's only out in the country a little bit. It's a small village, Wynatskill.

CT: Did anybody of color ever walk into the salon?

GB: Not that I can remember. That is so funny that you said that. That's so long ago. You know you don't even think of that now.

CT: You know that's interesting because that's what inspired me to do this project. I lived in San Francisco for almost twenty years and went to the same salon all the time and San Francisco is one of the most diverse places, racially, in the country.

GB: Right, right.

CT: But in this salon, there were only Black women. And even though I was in a neighborhood that was being gentrified...

GB: But honey is that because of being able *to do* hair?

CT: It is the logistics of...who else could handle my hair texture? Right.

GB: 'Cause you know, there's so many different processes, compared to what we do. I don't know, I don't think I could...I would have to go back to school. I know I would. I would have to go back to school. But I never thought of that. You are right. But it's most all Black where you go, honey?

CT: It was all Black. But in every other area of my life I had so many different kinds of friends and it just seemed so strange to me.

GB: But did you ever ask the girls if they were licensed to do....

CT: They could do white hair.

GB: They could? That's so funny how that's segregated. Isn't it?

CT: It's still segregated. And that's what's really interesting to me. For all kinds of reasons, and it's not necessarily a good or bad thing, it just is what it is.

GB: I have a girl [Black?] that lives across the street. Hmmm. I should say to her, why don't you call and get your hair done. I don't think I could do it though. Her hair is lovely. She keeps it beautiful. But you're right, I should say to her, "Why don't you come to my shop?"

CT: Well probably because she's nervous...

GB: No, I don't think I could do it. Her hair is so beautiful. Whoever does her hair they do a beautiful job.

CT: I've been to White shops and they've completely messed up my hair.

GB: Oh, I believe it because I don't think...Hey Aileen [her model/client arrives]. This is my girl! Here's Aileen, my girlfriend, my friend. We're just still interviewing. I called you. Where were you girl?

AP: I was on my way down here.

GB: No, I called you earlier. Do you have your hearing aids in?

AP: No.

GB: Okay. That's why, you see? Candacy is asking me how old are my customers. She said, "Do you have anybody over seventy." I said, "Good Lord, we have ninety, let alone seventy!"

AP: Eighty-five!

GB: Eileen's eighty-five.

CT: How long have you been seeing Gail?

AP: Thirty-nine years.

GB: When her daughter got married, her girlfriend Marge always came to me from Wynatskill. And when her daughter got married, that's when she started coming to me.

AP: I tried for a long time to get an appointment but she was always booked.

GB: Too busy.

AP: She was booked, booked, booked. So I had to wait 'til somebody left.

GB: Died! [laughing]

AP: Died. I didn't want to say that [laughing].

GB: Then she got a steady appointment.

CT: So what was the word on the street? What was worth waiting for? What did she do that was so special?

AP: She did hair very, very good.

GB: I did alright. I had a good name. I had a good business. I was popular, right Aileen?

AP: Yes, you were.

GB: I was. I'll be honest.

AP: As far as color goes, she was very good on color. It transitioned from blonde to this.

GB: To gray.

AP: It just naturally grew in and you didn't even realize it.

GB: I know, we just did it real easy and then she went back to her white hair after all these years.

AP: She was very good at styling.

GB: Yeah, I liked that too.

AP: You are.

GB: I was good. I'd better be, huh? Or I won't be around too long.

AP: I assumed that you did proms and things?

GB: Oh yeah! All of the craziness back then, yeah.

CT: How often do you come?

AP: I come every week.

GB: Yeah, I told 'ya. Most of my customer's come every week.

AP: I have a set time and she's very flexible.

GB: Oh yes.

AP: If you don't feel well, you call and she'll say, "When you feel better come in. If you don't, I'll see you next week."

CT: How far away do you live?

GB: Wynatskill area. How far is it?

AP: It takes me fifteen minutes, today it took a little longer, because they are working on Congress [street].

GB: But Aileen, we talk about everything. Yes we do. I was telling them that we talk about sickness, we talk about politics, religion....things we shouldn't. We get into arguments, but we always wind up being friends afterwards, and we've had a few...we have some sticky customer's still.

AP: We can differ but...

GB: But it does keep it exciting. We enjoy it.

AP: I look forward to coming in every Friday morning.

CT: She was saying that her customers share so much about their lives.

GB: Oh God yes! Poor Aileen, she's alone now. Yeah, I know all about her kids. They were little, they were young...

AP: Yeah, kids, great kids, great-grand kids. Gotta bring pictures in an show 'em. That's a must. My granddaughter got married a year ago and she came...

GB: Oh, I came down and took pictures of her. Eileen looked beautiful. God bless her.

CT: That's incredible that you're so intertwined in each other's lives.

GB: That's how I was trying to explain. It's so hard. We lost so many people you know. Our Friday mornings used to be really crowded and not anymore. We lost a lot.

AP: And then when we went to work for a short period you accommodated us for...

GB: Oh yeah, they used to work the taxes in March.

AP: We had to work Friday, so she took us Thursday night after work. That was really, really good. You don't want to go to work...

GB: That was a long time ago. Holy crap, I forgot about that. I worked the taxes too. It's a nice little side job for something different to do. You don't work too long, which is good.

AP: Ten weeks.

GB: Yeah, that's it.

CT: [To Aliene] I'm so glad that you came today. I'm excited to see her [Gail] in her glory.

AP: She is the best.

GB: She's good, she's good.

CT: Is there anything that we didn't talk about that you wanted to mention on tape?

GB: I don't know honey, you've got to ask the questions. I could go on and on and on [laughing] you know I can! What else, babe?

CT: Well, one question I didn't ask was what percentage of people, roughly, would you say want something done to their hair that's not conducive to their hair type?

GB: The ones that come in with pictures and say, "I want my hair like this." Or they show you a picture of a wig. Marge always had wig pictures. Not anymore, I don't think there's anybody that really that does that. Once in a great while, I'll get somebody but very seldom.

CT: Are there any celebrities that people want to look like?

GB: Oh Lord. Not now, we're past that.

AP: Betty White.

GB: Yeah [laughing] Betty White! There you go.

CT: But really? Do people want to look like Betty White?

GB: No! I don't think so [laughing].

AP: But that would be the only one in my age.

GB: Yeah, right, but I can't think of anybody that has said that in a long time, since we were young.

AP: Years ago, they used to come in with pictures but not lately.

GB: Yeah, not lately. I don't see people with pictures anymore. The only one lately is Ginger. Ginger is back in the '50s. She has clothes that are back *from* the '50s. Her house is the '50s. She wears her hair, high up, she was a hairdresser, tells me where to place the rollers. "I want it *up* and *back*! Oh, and don't use that spray net, I have my own. I have my own shampoo." She has everything. She even brings her color in. She used to bring her perms in, which were the same, identical perms I used. But she had to bring it in. Which I was happy with, it saves me money. I don't have to buy her a perm. But yeah, she lives close by. She's fairly new though. She isn't an old, old customer but God love her.

CT: Do you find that one's who are hard to please are a challenge?

GB: Yeah, not anymore though. Not like it used to be.

AP: She's very patient. You are very patient with people...

GB: Like Ginger, people like Ginger. I just try to [let them] do their own thing. "You want me to do this? Ok, I'll do it." It doesn't bother me.

AP: I come right after Ginger's here so I see it.

CT: But is she happy when you finish?

GB: Oh yeah. Well she comes every week, so she must be.

CT: Because some people just don't know how to explain what they want.

AP: I don't. I just say do what you want.

GB: Most people today say that, you know years back it was different, we were younger, we were fussy, but now we're like, whatever.

AP: If we were going to a party, we'd want our hair done Saturday morning and if she could, she would. But I think your clientele is kind of past that.

GB: Yeah, they don't, even like Christmas and New Years....most...I used to be....oh, it was horrible. And now, one of my customers, remember Marge Buda,

she worked in a bakery, you know how you take a number in a bakery? As they'd walk in the door she'd say, "Take a number. Your number is three." [laughing] And we'd all be sitting around waiting for Gail to get done, oh God. But it was fun and everybody got along which was nice.

AP: And your Mom was there.

GB: Yeah, she helped all the time. This is Candacy's Mom, Carol here. That makes a big difference.

AP: Yeah, and she was there to help calm people down.

GB: Oh yeah to calm people down. "Just relax" [she'd say] "She'll get to 'ya." My mother was...

AP: She was the boss.

GB: Yeah. She was the boss! [laughing] They could walk all over me but not my Mom. She wouldn't let them walk all over me.

AP: She's [Gail] so easy.

GB: I was telling her about the prices. You're kids keep saying, "Will she raise her prices, please?" But that's fine.

AP: They don't believe what I pay.

CT: She's not doing it for the money.

GB: No. I like it.

AP: She must like what she does.

GB: I like being with the people. Oh, you wanna see any pictures? [looking at old photos] This is part of the [Hairdressers] Association, but this is back...what is that '73 my mother wrote? We can shuffle through these. Just to give you an idea of the things we used to do. This here is a show that my sister-in-law did and we won. This was a show I did up in, it was a hairdresser's show, not me, this was up in the field house when Jimmy Durante was up there. I wore this outfit in a competition, an Uncle Sam outfit because Uncle Sam was born here in Troy. This here was a show that we did, my brother-in-law sang, we did it at the tent, I was Venus, he sang Venus and we had all our hairdressers around. These are other competitions that I was in...oh yeah, I got the parade here too, that was on a float we made.

CT: How many people were here?

GB: Oh, that was really big! They did stage shows. That's where I mean like Sammy Davis [Jr.] who else, Joan Rivers...all the big names came there. It was a

big place. It was a revolving stage. This was a parade we did in Troy for the Association. This outfit was supposed to represent the Wild Rose, which is the state flower. This was another one where we had the costume made for Schenectady and this was for New York state.

AP: Did you go to the Catskills too, for some shows?

GB: Yeah we did the Catskills. This was a friend of mine, Mary. She was my stylist for that. I don't know if that was the same one, we had hats we had everything, we did it all. These were beautiful. These were capes that they did for me, down at the Concord. Do you remember the Concord Carol? You probably heard of it, that was a long time ago, many, many moons ago. These were up at the Sunset, that's when I worked for Joan, my God, look at these Aileen! There's a date on the back....'63, '63! This one here, I don't know but this was in the same area. These are just all the same things really. Aren't they unbelievable though? But we did a lot of different things.

AP: She does her own hair too.

GB: Yeah, poor Aileen. Aileen loves long hair.

CT: Do you do teasing styles?

GB: Oh yeah, oh God, yes. You'll see me. I'll tease some of Aileen's today. Oh yes. And Ginger. Ginger is teased, really teased. But yeah, I still do teasing, a lot of people like it. I was a redhead for a long time. I wore my head red. I did black. I did platinum. I was platinum for a while.

AP: She does short, long...

GB: Yeah long, you name it. And Aileen, she cries. Normally it would be a Thursday. She'd come in and I'd say, "I am so sick of this hair." And I would start cutting. I had hair like this [gesturing past her shoulder] and I'd just chop it all off and I'd have short hair and she'd sit there crying. "Don't do that!"

AP: Because I love long hair. I've never been able to wear long hair, because when I was a kid, I wore it up to here.

GB: Yeah, her father used to send her to the barber.

AP: I used to go to the barber, that's because you know.

CT: You always wanted long hair but you never grew it out?

AP: No, never, I always wore it short. And when I got a little older, I permed it.

GB: Yeah, never had long hair. But I was showing Candacy about the book [appointment book], how years ago, all the people you know...like this would be

a Friday morning. Marge McDermott, Eleanor Clason, Marge Mosiuk, Mary Church, Laura O'Brien Aileen, Mary Haughney.

AP: Oh poor Mary.

GB: Isn't that horrible? Horrible! This one. Sarah Beale, Oh my God. I was telling Candacy, it's so hard to even think about it. I get filled up. It's really tough.

AP: Well when you do somebody for so long.

GB: Mrs. DeCelle, remember?

AP: Oh, God, with her high heels.

GB: Oh yes, she was an older girl, lovely, very petite. She'd come in and she just always wore spikes, as long as I ever knew her. Didn't she, Aileen? Spiked heels. God bless her. Unreal. Oh you wanna see these? [looking at more pictures] This is my girlfriend Joanie, right there, I'm here, that's me...isn't it? Here, right here, with dark hair! Yeah, yeah, that's me [smiling]. And my other girlfriend Kathy is there. Kathy, myself and Joanie worked together out at the JoAnn Shop. And we would get in *a lot* of trouble. We all went to high school together. Joanie, I was friends with from grammar school. And we really did get into a lot of trouble.

CT: What did you do?

GB: Well, we would get real silly and we'd start dancing and singing and then some of the customers didn't like that, they thought that we should be serious. It was a small community. And they would call my boss up and say, "You don't know what those girls are doing over there." And then Joan would come down and there was a girl that lived behind us and she'd get us in the kitchen and she'd say, "Stop doing what you're doing. You're making them nervous." And everybody in all of Wynatskill would know, *oh the girls are in trouble now* [laughing], because she was the only shop out there at one point. Remember? Oh there was Dottie and then Pat Fitzgerald's, but Joan really had the big shop.

CT: So for the tape [looking at the photo] you are the fourth one from the right.

GB: Yep, that's me, dark hair and all, many moons ago, we thought we were gorgeous. Oh my God.

CB: I remember those days [laughing].

GB: Don't you? Oh God! I'm going to be seventy in February.

CT: So you're going to be seventy!

GB: Yes seventy.

CT: You look amazing.

GB: I always say I'm five years older, so I've been seventy for at least five years [laughing]. I will be seventy-five when I hit seventy, because then people say, "Wow, you look good for your age." If I make myself younger, it doesn't work.

Oh, I can't believe you wanted to see those pictures. That's good, I'm glad. I wish I had my old license. My teacher in school was Joan LaFleur, one of my teachers, and that's the girl I went to work for. And the only reason she really hired me, it wasn't so much for what I could do, because she taught us well. She hired me because I always called her Mrs. LaFleur and not Joan. Can you believe that? School was okay but she really taught us well. Holy crap. I can remember crying one time. I had to roll the back of a permanent, I betcha four times until I got it the way that *she* wanted me to get it, but that was okay. That was the way we learned, she was really strict.

CB: That's the way teachers were back then.

GB: Yes, not like now. Now the girls go in...they're on their own really, they rent a booth, they do whatever. Like she taught us how to keep cards on people for the perms for the colors from day one. You change something and that went right on the card. Now, they don't, they just aren't the same.

AP: They don't even know how to pin curl.

GB: Oh, I know. I know! They don't. They don't learn how to set. A lot of my customer's, if I'm away, they have a problem because they don't know where to go. Nobody can set their hair.

CT: Hmm mmm. I have to bring my rollers to hair salons.

GB: Have you really?

CT: Because they didn't even have rollers.

GB: Yeah, they don't.

AP: My daughter-in-law who lives in Colorado, all she did was blow dry, she didn't roll, she didn't set with anything.

GB: Just blow-dry. That's really the way it is now.

CT: It's too much work. Because then when you get it done that way, it doesn't last.

GB: You got it! I'm so glad you said that. Rollers hold forever! They do, boy. If you didn't brush through that, it stays. For myself, I can throw some big, big pink curls in mine if it's damp at night and then I can plop it up on top of my head and I'll have curl on the top of my head. I don't wear it down anymore, that's for sure. No more, it's much too long. But we travel more now so it's nice for cruises or

going away to just be able to throw my hair up on top of my head. That's my main thing.

AP: Yeah, and you can go in the water and get your hair wet not worry about whether the set's going to wash out.

GB: Yeah, I don't have to worry.

CT: What kind of setting lotion do you use?

GB: I just use Volumax Mousse, that's all. I've been using that forever, some gel.

CT: I use Lottabody.

GB: Right, right. I don't go in for a lot of different things. Do we Aileen?

AP: Whatever you use is fine with me.

GB: Yeah, it works out with Aileen. [looking at photos] But this is Joan LaFleur. That's who I worked for, for years. This girl she gave up hairdressing eventually, I seen her out at Walmart. She was a greeter and what do I always say? My dream job is to be a greeter in Walmart! Wouldn't you love it? They come in and you say, "Good morning! How are you? Would you like a cart?" I love it. And you get paid! [laughing] It's so weird. I love it. That's my dream job.

AP: I'll be your assistant.

GB: Yes, you can be my assistant. You can push the cart out for them.

AP: I'll help the ones who are handicapped.

GB: Anything else?

CT: No, now I can photograph you doing hair. This has been a great interview [I take the microphone off of her shirt].

GB: Are you sure? I hope I let you know about a lot of stuff. I wanted to tell you about my son, I just didn't get to tell you everything. I could be here for hours, because we raised him over there. Didn't we Aileen? We had a crib over there.

AP: Yeah, yeah. And anything that went wrong, he would say, "Picarillo did it."

GB: Oh yeah, he used to blame everything on her. I'd say, "Frankie, what did you do?" [he'd say] "Not me Mommy, it was Picarillo." I think he loved her last name, the sound of it and he used it for everything.

[END]